

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1458

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

C O N F I D E N T I A L YAOUNDE 1353

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, ACOM, CM, US, GG, ZA, EK, CF

SUBJECT: CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR BINDZI

REF: YAOUNDE 706

1. SUMMARY. IN THREE CONVERSATIONS ON THREE SUCCESSIVE WORKING DAYS WITH CAMEROON AMBASSADOR TO THE US BENOIT BINDZI, HE EMPHASIZED CAMEROON'S PRO-WESTERN POSITION, REFERRED TO PRESENT STAND OF OUR WATTS REQUEST, AND SURVEYED EXTERNAL THREATS TO CAMEROON AS AN ISLAND OF STABILITY AND MODERATION IN CENTRAL AFRICAN SEA OF INCIPIENT CHAOS AND RADICALISM. END SUMMARY.

2. AMBASSADOR BINDZI, IN YAOUNDE FOR CONFERENCE OF ALL 23 CAMEROONIAN CHIEFS OF MISSION, CONVERSED WITH ME THREE TIMES: MARCH 25, AT DINNER GIVEN BY SECRETARY GENERAL IN PRESIDENCY EBOUA FOR SOVIET, FRENCH, PRC, AND SAUDI AMBASSADORS OR CHARGE AND THEIR GURC COUNTERPARTS, ATTENDED ALSO BY MINISTER IN PRESIDENCY SENGAT KUO AND EBOUA'S DEPUTY BOUBA BELLO; MARCH 28, AT LUNCHEON I GAVE IN HONOR OF VISITING ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION VICE PRESIDENT JOSEPH BLACK, WHICH WAS ALSO ATTENDED BY VICE MINISTER OF EDUCATION DOROTHY NDJEUMA AND VICE CHANCELLOR OF UNIVERSITY DR. VICTOR NGU; AND MARCH 29, WHEN BINDZI CALLED ON

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ME AT EMBASSY TO MEET ALSO WITH RDO/Y KOEHRING AND HIS DEPUTY GILBERT. KOEHRING HAD CALLED ON BINDZI WHILE ON CONSULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON, AND BINDZI DURING ONE WEEK HERE HAS ALREADY BEEN HELPFUL IN MAKING BUREAUCRACY MORE RESPONSIVE TO US AID'S NEEDS. BINDZI ALSO USED INFLUENCE TO POSTPONE TRIP TO US BY CHANCELLOR OF UNIVERSITY AND VICE CHANCELLOR NGU IN ORDER TO MAKE POSSIBLE VISITS BEYOND WASHINGTON TO US EDUCATIONAL

INSTITUTIONS.

3. JUST BEFORE MARCH 29 CALL, BINDZI HAD AUDIENCE WITH PRESIDENT AHIDJO, DURING WHICH, HE TOLD ME, HE INQUIRED ABOUT STATUS OF WATTS DECISION AND URGED THAT PRESIDENT APPROVE IT. BINDZI HAD EARLIER TOLD ME THAT THE MATTER WAS NOW AT THE LEVEL OF THE PRESIDENCY. AHIDJO TOLD HIM THAT HE WAS AWAITING HIS TECHNICAL COUNSELLORS' ADVICE ON THE MATTER. WHEN I GENTLY ASKED WHETHER INDICATIONS WERE MORE POSITIVE OR MORE NEGATIVE, HE NOODED AT POSITIVE, WHICH IS HIS OWN PREFERENCE. BINDZI, WHO WAS FULLY FAMILIAR WITH EXCHANGE OF NOTES (REFTEL), THOUGHT THAT GURC STILL HAD SOME "DIFFICULTIES", NATURE OF WHICH HE DID NOT KNOW. I REPEATED OUR OFFER TO ANSWER ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS. WE AGAIN AGREED WITH ONE ANOTHER ON BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF ESTABLISHMENT OF WATTS STATION FOR US-CAMEROONIAN RELATIONS, AMERICAN INVESTMENT, ETC.

4. THIS NATURALLY LED BINDZI INTO DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION. EBOUA ON MARCH 25 HAD ASKED ME ABOUT THE CONGO, NOT REALIZING THAT US HAD SUSPENDED RELATIONS YEARS AGO. I ASKED BOTH EBOUA AND BINDZI ABOUT THEIR POSITION ON TROUBLES IN ZAIRE. BOTH FAVORED NIGERIAN MEDIATION EFFORT AND, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING RECENT VISIT TO YAOUNDE OF ZAIRE PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY, THEY DENIED ANY DIRECT OR INDIRECT INVOLVEMENT SUPPORTIVE OF THIS EFFORT. EBOUA EXPLAINED THIS IN TERMS OF CAMEROON'S EARLY OPPOSITION TO MPLA. (FYI: GURC'S RELATIONS WITH MOBUTU HAVE ALSO BEEN AT BEST STAND-OFFISH. END FYI)

5. BINDZI EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS WHICH
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ECHOED EARLIER STATEMENTS TO ME BY AHIDJO AND EBOUA, BUT BINDZI WENT FARTHER AFIELD BY ANTICIPATING THAT, IF PRESENT TRENDS CONTINUE, ZAMBIA, ZAIRE, AND CAMEROON WOULD BE ONLY PRO-WESTERN COUNTRIES LEFT IN SOUTHERN-CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION. (COMMENT: USE OF TERM "PRO-WESTERN" INSTEAD OF "MODERATE" OR NON-ALIGNED IS RARE, AND I CAN RECALL ONLY ONE INSTANCE WHEN GURC LEADER USED IT. END COMMENT) BINDZI SAID CAMEROON WAS FORTUNATE TO HAVE EXPERIENCED, WISE LEADER IN AHIDJO, AND THAT PRESENT POSITION OF COUNTRY SHOULD BE CONSOLIDATED AGAINST EXTERNAL THREATS. HE REFERRED TO PROVERB ACCORDING TO WHICH IT IS BETTER TO FORESTALL THAN TO HAVE TO RESTORE. BY CONSOLIDATION AGAINST EXTERNAL THREATS HE MEANT ARMS ASSISTANCE, AND HE DISCUSSED COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA AND CONGO, ALONG WITH LIKELIHOOD THAT AFTER CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN ZAIRE AND CONCLUSION OF CASTRO'S ANGOLAN VISIT, INCREASED CUBAN PRESENCE IN EG AND CONGO WOULD LIKELY BE TARGETED AGAINST CAMEROON.

6. I AGREED WITH HIM ON AHIDJO'S LEADERSHIP AND TOLD HIM OF MY THESIS ABOUT AHIDJO'S SUCCESS IN INSTITUTIONALIZING GOVERNMENT

IN CAMEROON TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT, WERE HE TO DISAPPEAR TOMORROW, THINGS WOULD GO ON PRETTY MUCH AS BEFORE; FOR THAT VERY REASON, HOWEVER, AHIDJO STANDS IN LESS DANGER OF DISAPPEARING THAN ANY OF HIS COUNTERPARTS IN THREE TIERS OF COUNTRIES SURROUNDING CAMEROON. BINDZI ACCEPTED THE EVALUATION BUT CAUTIONED THAT ONE CAN NEVER KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER A LEADER DISAPPEARS.

7. THIS LED ME LOGICALLY TO INQUIRE ABOUT INTERNAL THREATS. HE SAID THAT THERE WERE NONE. I ASKED ABOUT STORIES TO THE EFFECT THAT UPC ELEMENTS WERE BEING GRAINED BY CUBANS IN THE CONGO. HE ACKNOWLEDGED POSSIBILITY. I THEN ASKED ABOUT EVENTS IN JUNE 1976, WHEN UPC PAMPHLETS WERE DISTRIBUTED AT THE UNIVERSITY IN YAOUNDE AND IN DOUALA AND ARRESTS OF THEIR SUSPECTED DISTRIBUTORS OCCURRED. BINDZI DISMISSED THIS AS SOWING WILD OATS BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTIONED ONE PRESENT GURC MINISTER WHO HAD BEEN A UPC LEADER A FEW YEARS AGO DURING HIS STUDENT DAYS IN PARIS. AS THEY GET OLDER, YOUNG PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THE REALITIES. HE REPEATED
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THAT THERE WAS NO INTERNAL THREAT TO AHIDJO AND AGREED WITH THOSE PARTS OF MY THESIS WHICH ARE BASED UPON AHIDJO'S COOPTING OF FORMER OPPONENTS AND HIS BRINGING INTO POSITIONS OF HIGH RESPONSIBILITY A WHOLE NEW GENERATION, WHOSE MEMBERS RANGE IN AGE FROM THEIR TWENTIES INTO THEIR EARLY FORTIES. NEVERTHELESS, BINDZI EMPHASIZED THAT, ALTHOUGH AHIDJO IS ONLY FIFTY-TWO YEARS OLD, ONE COULD NOT KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF HE WERE TO DISAPPEAR AND SHOULD THEREFORE NOW CONSOLIDATE CAMEROON'S POSITION IN THIS UNSTABLE REGION.

8. BINDZI IS STAYING IN CAMEROON FOR ANOTHER TEN DAYS, ATTENDING TO PERSONAL BUSINESS. HE TOLD ME HE WOULD TRY TO CALL UPON ME ONCE MORE PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR WASHINGTON AND SEEMED TO BE HINTING THAT THERE MIGHT BE DECISION ON WATTS BY THEN.
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